

TESTIMONY OF MICHAEL K. YOUNG, CHAIR
United States Commission on International Religious Freedom
BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL
RELATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL OPERATIONS AND
HUMAN RIGHTS

February 13, 2002



Commission Chair Michael K. Young testifies about religious freedom in China and Vietnam before the House International Relations Committee Subcommittee on International Operations and Human Rights.

Thank you, Madame Chairman for the opportunity to testify before this subcommittee on religious persecution in China and Vietnam, and I commend you and the members of the subcommittee for holding this important hearing.

CHINA

The widespread and serious abuses of the right to freedom of religion and belief in China are well documented by our Commission, the State Department, and religious and other nongovernmental organizations. In October 2001, for the third straight year, the Secretary of State concluded that the Chinese government severely and systematically violates freedom of religion and belief, and therefore named China once again a "country of particular concern" under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998. The Commission concludes that the Chinese government's respect for freedom of religion and belief has deteriorated in the past year. The Government of China has committed numerous serious violations against members of many of China's religious and spiritual communities, including Evangelical Christians, Roman Catholics, Tibetan Buddhists, Uighur Muslims, as well as the Falun Gong and other groups that the government has labeled "evil cults";

In the wake of being granted Permanent Normal Trade Relations status by the United States and successfully bidding to host the 2008 Olympics, the government has tightened its control over religion in China. At China's December 2001 national religious-affairs conference, President Jiang Zemin stated, "Religion must never be allowed when it opposes the direction of the party or the socialist system, or destroys national reunification or ethnic unity." The government put this doctrine into practice just last month, when it intensified its crackdown on the religious association and practices of Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang.

Immediately after the religious-affairs conference, China further demonstrated its resolve to tighten its control of religious organizations and their activities by handing down a death sentence to Pastor Gong Shengliang of the underground Protestant South China Church. Other church members were given sentences up to life imprisonment. Their major crime? Using a so-called "evil cult" to "undermine the enforcement of the law." Last month, the same law was used to indict Li Guangqiang, a Hong Kong businessman, for allegedly smuggling Bibles to another underground Protestant group. Mr. Li was released last weekend in advance of President Bush's state visit next week.

The Chinese government also continues to deny foreign diplomats and human rights monitors, including UN representatives, access to the boy designated by the Dalai Lama to be the 11th Panchen Lama. He has not been seen since 1995.

Muslim Uighur businesswoman Rebiya Kadeer remains in jail serving an eight-year sentence for "harming national security." Her crime: sending her husband in the U.S. clippings from Chinese newspapers, on which he commented over Radio Free Asia.

The Commission has adopted a new set of specific recommendations for the U.S. government that fall under four headings. It is this Commission's conclusion that, in order to protect freedom of thought, conscience, religion, and belief, the Chinese government must take effective steps in the following four critical areas. U.S. policy should encourage such steps and effectively respond, whether they are or are not taken.

1. China must end its current crackdown on religious and spiritual groups.
2. China must reform its repressive legal framework and establish an effective mechanism to hold officials accountable for religious-freedom and related human rights violations.
3. China must affirm the universality of religious freedom and China's international obligations and must ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.
4. China must foster a culture of respect for human rights.

The Commission is making its full set of new policy recommendations public for the first time at this hearing. In the interest of time, I won't review all of them now, but I respectfully request, Madame Chairman, that the full set of recommendations be included in the formal hearing record. I will focus on a few key points.

The Chinese government has used torture, detention, intimidating surveillance, discrimination, and other unconscionable practices against an untold number of persons simply because they openly practice their religion or belief. This must stop. The U.S. should use every diplomatic opportunity to urge the Chinese to cease these abuses and should integrate this effort into all aspects of bilateral cooperation and dialogue, including security and counterterrorism. In addition, the President should ensure that religious freedom is a prominent agenda item for state visits in either direction - indeed, after President Bush publicly expressed his concern for the Hong Kong businessman accused of smuggling Bibles, the charges against him were reduced and he was sentenced to a term much less than was originally sought. Before any state visit to China, the President should also receive assurances that he will have the opportunity to address a Chinese audience on human rights in a live and uncensored broadcast. President Reagan's similar address to Russian students at Moscow State University in 1988 was popular and memorable among Russians. The Commission wrote to the White House on January 31 to urge that the President obtain assurances from the Chinese government before he goes to China this week that he be given such a speaking opportunity.

The U.S. should emphasize to the Chinese government the positive contributions that religion and believers can make to Chinese society, as well as the need to permit both faith-based and

secular organizations to provide humanitarian and social services freely within China.

The Commission welcomes the resumption of the bilateral human rights dialogue. We believe, however, that such a mechanism should not only communicate U.S. concerns about human rights violations in China. It must also establish measurable goals and practical steps for improvement. Mere dialogue should not be an end in itself.

The U.S. should also work multilaterally to foster human rights improvements in China. As a key component of this effort, we should continue to propose and promote a resolution to censure China at annual meetings of the UN Commission on Human Rights. We recently wrote to Secretary Powell, stating that it was extremely important that the United States serve as an active member of the UN Commission on Human Rights as the U.S. stands virtually alone in striving to focus world attention on specific violations of human rights. Furthermore, the U.S. government should seek to establish a diplomatic presence in Tibet and Xinjiang to demonstrate our concern and to monitor religious freedom and other human rights. I should note that, thanks to the work of the International Relations Committee, the House has adopted language calling for a branch consular office in Lhasa as part of the Foreign Relations Authorization Act, which is awaiting action by the Senate.

The U.S. government's China policy should include a number of practical steps to promote religious freedom and other human rights. These include support and, as appropriate, funding for human rights advocates within China, as well as those, wherever found, who are promoting the rule of law, legal reform, and democracy there. The U.S. government should make sure that Tibetan and other ethnic minorities, as well as representatives of religious communities and other nongovernmental organizations, are included in exchange programs with China.

Madame Chairman, it is U.S. policy to oppose violations of religious freedom and other human rights throughout the world, not just in China. Through enhanced public diplomacy, the United States should directly and frankly explain to the Chinese people this message and the reasons for our concern. Such efforts should include the expansion of Radio Free Asia and Voice of America broadcasts throughout China. Since the U.S. permits Chinese media, including the official Chinese Central Television company, access to American markets, we should ensure that U.S. media, including broadcasting companies, are allowed a similar presence in Chinese markets. Also, the U.S. government should ensure that U.S. companies doing business in China do not engage in practices that would facilitate violations of religious freedom and other human rights, such as disclosing employees' religious or spiritual activities or affiliations to Chinese officials.

Now that PNTR status has eliminated the annual review of human rights in China, the work of this subcommittee in holding these kinds of hearings and continuing such reviews on an ongoing basis takes on even greater importance. The Commission on International Religious Freedom stands ready to join with you and cooperate in this effort.

VIETNAM

Moving now to Vietnam, the Commission has closely followed the situation there for quite some time. In both 2000 and 2001, we noted that the government of Vietnam had committed grave violations of religious freedom, and we urged the State Department to monitor carefully the conditions there. In February of 2001, we held a public hearing on Vietnam here in Washington, at which several overseas representatives of Vietnamese religious communities testified, as well as experts on U.S.-Vietnam relations. Also, in May 2001, we issued a set of recommendations for the U.S. government in a chapter of our annual report. A delegation from our Commission soon will be conducting a fact-finding mission to Vietnam at the invitation of its government - which we have sought since December of 2000. This visit hopefully will afford us additional first hand information and direct dialogue with that government.

Religious-freedom conditions in Vietnam have deteriorated since the release of our report in May. In particular, several leading religious figures have been imprisoned or placed under house arrest. In October, Vietnamese authorities sentenced Father Thaddeus Nguyen Van Ly to 15 years in prison for "undermining national unity." Father Ly has been a persistent critic of the Vietnamese government's failure to protect religious freedom, and he provided written testimony to the Commission for its Vietnam hearing. As you know, the government took action against Father Ly despite protests by several members of Congress, the Administration and our Commission.

The Vietnamese government has also recently detained or imprisoned several leaders of religious groups that are not officially recognized, including The Venerable Thich Huyen Quang and The Venerable Thich Quang Do of the United Buddhist Church of Vietnam, The Rev. Nguyen Hong Quang of the Mennonite Church in Ho Chi Minh City, and Mr. Le Quang Liem of the Hoa Hao Buddhist Church. In addition, serious reports continue to emerge from ethnic minority regions of Vietnam, where the government has severely restricted access. A government-sponsored renunciation campaign appears to continue against ethnic Hmong Christians in the northwestern provinces as well as Montagnards in the Central Highlands. Montagnards who have fled to Cambodia to escape unrest in their home provinces have reportedly been subjected to ill-treatment upon their repatriation to Vietnam. While conversations between the Vietnamese government and leaders of the Catholic Church have

led to some improvements, there remain a number of issues, such as admission of men to seminaries and licensing of priests, that indicate an unnecessary control by the government of Church activity. Finally, while the government early last year did recognize the Evangelical Church of Vietnam in the south, we have yet to see substantial evidence of that organization's independence from the state.

This kind of behavior does not help the Vietnamese government make its case that it deserves international loans or additional trade benefits from the United States while it fails to uphold its international human rights commitments. I would note that Father Ly was sentenced not two weeks after the U.S.-Vietnam Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA) was ratified. In light of the actions that the Vietnamese government has taken in the past several months, it remains imperative for our government to send the message that the protection of human rights, including religious freedom, is a continuing priority for the United States.

In this regard, the Commission praised the House for passing the Vietnam Human Rights Act (H.R. 2833) in September 2001. The Act not only expresses Congress's concern over violations of religious freedom by the Vietnamese government, it would implement several Commission policy recommendations. We support the bill and urge the Senate to pass it. In addition, the Commission made several other recommendations in our May 2001 report, and with your permission I would request that those also be made a part of the hearing record.

Madame Chairman, violations of religious freedom continue in both Vietnam and China, but we continue to hope that U.S. policy actions will precipitate a positive change in behavior by the governments of both these countries. Hearings like this one can only help focus the attention of the administration and the general public on these grave issues and put these governments on notice that their abuses will not be overlooked. I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today and assure you that the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, consistent with its statutory mandate, stands ready to work with you to encourage religious freedom in these countries and throughout the world.

I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.

Recomendations for China

May 1, 2001 Commission Report on Vietnam